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The Dynamics of Enlargement in International Organizations

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Most international organizations (IOs) expand their membership over the course of their lifespan. Although these enlargements tend to be heralded as normatively positive — for the IOs themselves, for the new members, and for cooperative outcomes more generally — expansions can also lead to conflicts in the organization. What conditions lead to enlargement rounds that reshape an organization in unexpected ways? We argue that, depending upon the diversity of the initial group of countries, members may vote to admit new entrants that can tilt organizational decision-making in unexpected directions. We anticipate fewer enlargements with lesser impact on the character of the organization among organizations that have either a smaller range of founding members or a relatively even initial dispersion. We develop an agent-based model that accounts for the complex decision-making environment and social dynamics that typify IO accession processes. The model helps us explain how the nature of decision-making in organizations can shift following enlargement, likely changing the organization's output and goals.

Keywords: international organizations, enlargement, agent-based models

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Introduction

Almost every international organization (IO) at some point expands to include new members. But many of these enlargement rounds bring in countries that differ from the organization’s founders. Can the inclusion of more disparate members shift the IO’s internal dynamics? And why do existing IO members admit states that could shift the balance of power? Existing research on IO enlargement tends to focus on the bargaining and geopolitical circumstances behind enlargement.¹ But it does not account for the group dynamics that might make enlargements more likely, even when they could dilute or change the organization’s original policy intent.

Using an agent-based model, we propose an original theory to explain two different phenomena with respect to IO enlargement. First, we argue that, within IOs, the constellation of initial members has a large impact on the number and disparity of new members an organization will admit. Given various initial membership configurations, members decide whether to admit new applicants based upon their perceptions — and, crucially, their misperceptions — about how these potential members would affect organizational decision-making. States support applicants that they believe would shift the decision-making outcomes in their direction.² This argument complements existing accounts of enlargement, which tend to focus

¹We address this paradox primarily from the point of view of the “supply side” of IO enlargement, focusing on member-state perspectives, in line with Schneider and Urpelainen (2012) and Davis and Wilf (2016). For the demand side — that is, for accounts of why countries would want to enter various international organizations — see, for example, Joliffe and Jupille (2011); Mattli (1999); Mattli and Plümper (2002).

²Mansfield and Pevehouse (2013) support this view, showing that preferential trade agreements (PTAs) expand to include states that share economic and political traits of existing members. Although others argue that IOs accept new members hoping to shape their preferences through socialization (Finnemore, 1996), or that they sometimes expand even when current members know expansion will come at a cost (Schimmelfennig, 2005), we argue that on balance states within IOs tend to favor new members that are at least proximate, relative to a potential pool of candidates.

on bargaining (Schneider, 2009; Steinberg, 2002) and logrolling (Davis, 2004) among existing member states or on the role of exogenous shocks (Kydd, 2001).

Second, we theorize about the impact that expansion rounds have on the character of the organization. We propose that admitting even one or two dissimilar members, especially to an otherwise homogenous group, can lead to long-term shifts in the organization as these members support the candidacy of new members that they perceive as being close to their own positions. Expansion to dissimilar members can fundamentally change the decision-making dynamics in the organization such that conflicts arise, or that new members join that would not have been admitted had the group been more homogeneous at the outset. This theoretical insight offers leverage on previously unanswered questions about the consequences of IO expansion on the stability of the organization and the persistence of its mission.

We argue that diversity is the key dimension for enlargement. More diverse groups enlarge faster and evolve more quickly, whereas more homogenous groups are slower to enlarge. This dynamic is due to the likelihood of misperceptions of potential candidates, which occur less frequently if the initial members are relatively similar. Our argument is primarily theoretical because of the difficulty of constructing counterfactuals or empirical tests surrounding IO enlargement. Simulations illustrate the dynamics of our model, and we further illustrate these propositions using examples of enlargement from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

IO Membership Growth

Relatively little work exists on the general dynamics of accession to international organizations.³ The complexity of the enlargement process presents scholars with a significant obstacle to developing and modeling a general theory of expansion. IO expansion usually entails several voting members on the supply side and a wide pool of potential applicants on the demand side. Moreover, the motivations for expansion often include material, geo-strategic, or even ideational considerations (Davis, 2013). Lastly, many organizations have different accession procedures. Organizations such as the EU, NATO, and to some extent

³But for exceptions, see Martin (1992) and Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal (2001).

the WTO subject potential new members to rigorous accession processes that often include meeting technical requirements and undergoing extensive policy reform. Much of the extant literature focuses on the group of organizations with the strictest requirements, such as the WTO (Copelovitch and Ohls, 2012; Neumayer, 2011; Pelc, 2011) and the EU (Schimmelfennig, 2002; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2002).

Many claim IO expansion is normatively good both for organizations and new members. Yet others point to the unintended consequences of expansion, not all of them positive (Pollack, 2000; Reiter, 2001; Slapin, 2015; Zielonka, 2001). Researchers note that once international organizations expand their membership base, they change irrevocably. New members, particularly those that diverge in character from existing ones, change the voting dynamics or even the overall identity of an organization. Some chalk this up to lack of compliance and enforcement failures in the organization itself (Börzel, 2001; Davis, 2012; Schimmelfennig, 2008), often as a result of decreased leverage on the part of the organization once applicant countries become full members (Vachudová, 2005), or as a result of domestic party constellations in new member states (Schimmelfennig, 2005). Anecdotal evidence has led some to speculate on the conditions under which a trade-off exists between expanding membership and deepening cooperation within organizations (Downs, Rocke and Barsoom, 1998; Gilligan, 2004; Kelemen, Menon and Slapin, 2014).

The dilemma of whether to expand increases in importance as more prospective states seek membership. Expansion affects an organization’s internal dynamics and can lead to uncertainty in the future. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) originated in 1967 in the shadow of the Cold War, in part to ally countries against the threat of communism. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the group admitted Vietnam in 1995, it was perceived as “an astonishing about-face.”⁴ Two years later the group agreed to admit Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, the first two of which were communist-ruled, and the third a military dictatorship. One editorial ran, “The Cambodian issue, like that of Burma, should cause ASEAN members to ask: what is the goal of the organization? It may be better for the group to travel hopefully than to arrive too soon at the point where it encompasses all 10

⁴“Vietnam joins ASEAN grouping,” *The Independent*, 29 July 1995.

of the region’s states but loses sight of its original objective. ... [when] its strength hitherto has been an uncontroversial common identity.”⁵

The tension between the benefits of enlargement and uncertainty about future outcomes points to a dilemma in the theory and practice of IO expansion. Although scholars and policy-makers assume more members give rise to greater cooperative gains and inclusiveness, expansion often comes at some cost to the way an organization functions. Many presume enlargement positively influences the organization; for example, literature in the functionalist tradition suggests that expansion increases opportunities for trade, and thus benefits all states (Haas, 1964). Others, however, argue that enlargement has the potential to hamper decision-making processes (König and Bräuninger, 2004), or may lead to mission creep (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999) and alienation of countries outside the organization (Kydd, 2001). Club goods theories (Buchanan, 1965; ?) imply that organizations face inevitable tradeoffs between the benefits of expanding organizations to new members and the depth of integration and gains to member states that can be achieved. However, most of those theories focus primarily on the number of new members, not the characteristics of new members. Outside of EU scholarship, which examines the issue extensively, little research looks at how expansion alters internal decision-making dynamics in international organizations.⁶

Theory

We argue that the diversity among founding members impacts the way that enlargement changes an organization. Unlike many theories that emphasize the risk of enlargement, we posit that it is the diversity of members that causes destabilization, not only the number of states. It does so through its effects on how existing members perceive, or misperceive, the

⁵“ASEAN shouldn’t admit Cambodia, Laos and Burma now,” *The New York Times* editorial, 21 April 1997.

⁶For research on EU decision-making following expansion, see Kelemen, Menon and Slapin (2014); Moravcsik and Vachudova (2003); Plümper and Schneider (2007); Schulz and König (2000). For other work on the effects of EU enlargement, see Elsig (2010); Epstein and Jacoby (2014); Jacoby (2004); Schneider (2009); Vachudova (2014).

position of potential new members. We begin by elaborating on the fundamental assumptions and definitions upon which our theory builds. In brief, the model applies to any area where actors in a group might potentially encounter a dimension of conflict. This makes the model useful for many types of settings in the social sciences, but it is particularly useful in the study of international organizations. We make three key assumptions about how organizations operate that help clarify when and how our theory applies.

The first concerns the *type* of IO, in terms of its issue area. We assume organizations have one primary, latent dimension along which states in an organization could potentially disagree. In regional economic organizations, this dimension could refer to the depth of trade integration. In security organizations, it could be the differences in military capacities and willingness or ability to pool resources.

The second assumption relates to *decision-making rules* in the organization and the degree of consensus required. We assume that states vote to admit members and that members also have formal or informal internal decision-making procedures for changing the organization's policy. The threshold required to admit new members may be the same or different from the threshold required to change policy. We choose an arbitrary threshold of simple majority for voting on enlargement, but the general dynamics hold regardless of threshold, as we demonstrate in the empirical section and in the online appendix. This accords with the practical process of enlargement: many organizations decide over accession by direct member-state vote (the African Union and the World Hydrographic Organization), or through representatives on plenary organs (the International Organization for Migration, the World Tourism Organization, and the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation). Others involve recommendation by at least one other organ (the United Nations and the UN Industrial Development Organization) or require accession to the constitutive organization (the Council of Europe, the Organization of American States, and the OECD).

The third assumption relates to the *mandate* of the organization in terms of enlargement. Multilateral organizations have different membership aims than do regional or bilateral organizations. Some may cite inclusiveness as their primary goal and indeed a furthering of their mandate. In contrast, regional organizations have a geographically bounded focus. But even among allegedly regional organizations, countries need not always be in the same region to

become members of these organization. In 2011, for example, Russia expressed interest in joining Hugo Chávez’s Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, an organization predicated on socialist revolution that had previously only included Latin American countries.⁷ And others define their region very broadly — the Association of Caribbean States, for example, includes Mexico as well as Guyana and Suriname. Furthermore, even organizations that end up with multilateral ambitions often start with smaller cores: the GATT began life with far fewer members than the current WTO, for example. Moreover, organizations that see inclusiveness as furthering their core mandate could see their enlargement dynamics change in either direction as a result of new members; NAFTA was originally slated to include all Latin American countries, but the admission of Mexico at the advent of its economic crisis turned sentiment away from further enlargement. Therefore, our model works best for organizations that fall in-between having an exclusive mandate and a universal one.

We now define several concepts central to our model. The first is *dispersion*, which refers to the diversity of member-state preferences and characteristics on a particular dimension. We think of dispersion with respect to how members fall on a given descriptive dimension that relates to the nature of the organization in question (for example, level of development, political systems or ideology, or cultural and linguistic differences). The second is *range*, which is the distance between the two most dissimilar members in the IO. These two concepts help capture the potential constellations of member-state diversity across various dimensions. The range and diversity of members, in turn, impact how current members perceive the positions of potential new members.

Two other concepts play a key role in our model: exogenous shocks and misperceptions. Following the literature that distinguishes between the emergence and maintenance of institutions (Calvert, 1995), we argue that the processes behind the creation of formal and informal rules by a set of initial members are fundamentally different from the processes of enlargement in an established organization. We do not explicitly model the former process, but rather we take the initial membership as exogenously given. The formation of IOs is

⁷“Medvedev meets with leaders of ALBA member-states,” *Russia & CIS General Newswire*, 27 November 2008.

often closely linked to random exogenous shocks. For example, the end of World War II created an environment in which the Bretton Woods organizations and the UN could emerge. The end of the war provided a set of countries that could form the initial memberships of these organizations, and set their initial rules, goals, and policies.

Furthermore, we argue that the causal mechanism behind enlargement is the possibility for misperceptions about candidates. We define misperceptions as inaccuracy surrounding a candidate's true characteristics, either in terms of their actual fundamentals or their voting preferences. Even though existing members seek to expand the organization to like-minded states, misperceptions can occur despite extensive efforts of members to resolve uncertainties regarding applicants. For example, EU applicants must negotiate 170,000 pages of the *acquis communautaire*, which can take several years. Similarly, when Saudi Arabia was in the WTO accession period, member states presented it with 70,000 pages of accession criteria. Indeed, much of the central theorizing about IOs rests on their ability to accrue and transmit information (Chapman, 2009; Fang, 2009; Keohane and Martin, 1995). But even if member states do their best to acquire information about candidates in the present, they can only partially anticipate countries' future behavior both within the organization as well as domestically. Candidate countries can also misrepresent their positions during the application process in a bid to seem more tenable. With hindsight, member states can more easily evaluate the sincerity of new members' efforts.

Mercosur, an agreement signed in 1991 by Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, provides an example. The organization's pro-market agenda was commended at the time as an embrace of neoliberal policies, with scholars praising Mercosur's "commitment to 'outward-oriented integration' — that is, from its determination to make members states more competitive in the international arena rather than to rely on closed markets" (Smith, 1993). But since enlargement to Venezuela and, prospectively, Bolivia, the rhetoric has changed. Recent reports describe the bloc as an example of an agreement "that encourages the type of regional integration sought by Bolivar and Chavez."⁸ A summit in 2012 "was

⁸"Mercosur summit ends in Argentina," *Telesur*, 17 December 2014.

dubbed as ‘the summit of country-risk leaders’ by international banks.”⁹

Misperceptions about Venezuela and its ability to be contained were key in this enlargement. The economic crises in Brazil in 1999 and Argentina in 2001 made Venezuela’s oil abundance attractive to those countries. Both of their currencies had been debased, and a cheap and local source of imported oil would have been of tremendous benefit to their economies (Nemec, 2008). But Brazil’s former foreign minister was quoted as saying, “It was a tremendous error to allow Chavez into Mercosur, not only because he wants to control it, but also because he is [Brazilian president] Lula’s biggest rival. [...] They thought they could influence Chavez, but he can’t be influenced.”¹⁰

From the perspective of an existing member, and given the uncertainty surrounding a candidate’s position, a member supports enlargement if the accession of the candidate either maintains the existing balance within the organization or tilts it in the direction of the member. In our model, when a sufficient number (at the very least a majority) of members support enlargement, it occurs. However, this can only happen when at least some of those members incorrectly perceive how the applicants’ accession affects the balance of the organization. In other words, they believe that the applicants’ admission will move policy-making outcomes closer to them, when, in fact, the opposite is true.¹¹ Thus, in our model misperceptions drive enlargement. The likelihood of misperceptions is a function of the true (and unknown to the member) policy distance between the member and the applicant. Misperceptions grow as the true distance between the member and the applicant increases.

⁹“Argentina, Mexico to sign motor vehicle agreement during Mercosur summit,” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 5 July 2012.

¹⁰“Venezuela wants trade group to embrace anti-imperialism,” *The New York Times*, 19 January 2007.

¹¹This reflects Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal (2001), who argue that IO membership will not expand if uncertainty is high. Schneider and Urpelainen (2012) touch on uncertainty in the accession process from the perspective of candidates regarding the accession requirements.

Due to misperceptions, the likelihood of expansion and its effects depends on an organization's initial membership constellation. Because members of an organization tend to support inclusion of countries that they perceive as being similar to them, new members will in turn vote in members close to their positions. This has the potential to shift the center of gravity of an organization to be even more distant from its founding position. As the model shows, when the range of initial positions is small, or the positions of the initial members fall evenly throughout the space, the organization is not likely to experience much change through enlargement. Any subsequent new members simply fill in the gaps among members, rather than tilt decision-making dynamics in any particular direction. Our model would suggest that enlargement could occur in this type of organization, but it is likely expansion will occur to states in the middle of the space and not affect the nature of the organization that drastically. In contrast, organizations with wide, clustered memberships, such as the GATT, would be expected to undergo more enlargement that is more likely to shift the position of pivotal states within the organization.¹³

¹²It is possible that over time misperceptions would diminish, as states reveal their true characters. However, it is equally possible that new dimensions of potential conflict might emerge in states with leadership turnover, or new IOs with different issue areas. If a new leader of a differing ideology comes to power, other states would have to relearn that state's propensities, since new leaders might not yet have established reputations (McGillivray and Smith, 2003). Furthermore, new global issues might present new areas of cooperation, such as the environment or the war on terror, where states do not yet hold fully formed preferences and behaviors.

¹³This account may seem to contradict the literature on socialization in international organizations. However, we argue that even if existing members anticipate some degree of socialization among new entrants, we still see some degree of divergence in preferences across states — enough to justify states favoring applicants whose attributes seem to map their own.

A Model of IO Membership Growth

Given the intricacy of IO enlargement processes, we require a model that can incorporate multiple actors interacting over long periods of time. We also need a model that captures the internal shifts that occur in an organization once it includes new members. For this reason, we utilize an agent-based model to capture the dynamics of organizational expansion. Agent-based models offer several advantages when modeling complex and dynamic processes. To remain tractable, game-theoretic models of accession often limit their games to two or three rounds of play and few (or sometimes n) actors. Decisions about enlargement, and realizations about how enlargement affects an organization’s decision-making process, though, occur over an extended period of time and affect all members. Our approach allows us to model complex scenarios with many actors over many rounds and arrive at equilibria that cannot be solved for analytically (De Marchi and Page, 2008; Laver and Sergenti, 2012).

One interpretation of our model, however, is that it follows on from where a game-theoretic signalling model might leave off. Imagine a two-player signalling game where an applicant country can be one of two types — a “good” type who will move the organization in a desired direction after enlargement, or a “bad” type who would change the organization in an undesirable manner. An organization wishes to admit the good types and exclude the bad. The applicant can send a signal regarding its type during the accession process, perhaps by the amount of effort it puts into reform, and the organization can decide whether or not to admit the state. In a pooling equilibrium in which the “bad” types mimic the signalling behavior of the “good”, the organization is not able to update its beliefs about the applicant’s type based on its behavior. The organization would simply pursue a mixed strategy based on the prior probability of facing a good applicant. In a series of single shot interactions, the organization would by chance admit “bad” applicants on occasion. These new members would undoubtedly have an impact on the nature of the organization, what types of states would be considered “bad” and “good” in the future, and therefore who would be admitted the next time the game is played. It is this relatively low information environment that we seek to model. In short, our modelling approach examines how the stochastic process in a previous strategic game affects outcomes in a subsequent game.

We model a unidimensional voting game in which members of an organization vote to admit new applicants.¹⁴ We maintain that the unidimensional set-up allows us to both capture distance between members and assume straightforward decision-making procedures; additionally, organizations often have a primary dimension of conflict. While calculating multidimensional distances between initial members would be relatively straightforward, the lack of a median in a multidimensional space makes predictions of spatial decision-making models significantly more complicated. We define a unidimensional space consisting of 100 “locations” ranging from 1 to 100. This dimension represents a generic space that can capture any aspects on which members of the organization differ (such as ideology, trade policy, factor endowments, or any other factor relevant for the organization). Members and applicants can be located at any one of the 100 locations in the space, and multiple actors can inhabit the same location.

The game begins with an initial membership defined by the number of participating states and their locations in the space. The game is played for a set number of rounds where in each round the existing members consider *one* membership application. This applicant may be voted into the organization, in which case it becomes a member and it, too, votes on applicants in subsequent rounds. Or it may be rejected, in which case the membership of the organization remains unchanged following the round of play.

In each round, the applicant’s true position in the space is drawn from a normal distribution with mean equal to the mean of the existing membership and with a fixed standard deviation. Therefore, in expectation, applicants true positions should be centrist with respect to the existing membership, but as the standard deviation increases, applicants with positions farther away from the existing membership become more likely.

Existing members do not observe the applicant’s true position. Instead, each member has a perception of the applicant’s position, which is a function of the true position and the spatial proximity between the member and the applicant. In particular, each member’s perception of the applicant is drawn from a normal distribution centered on the applicant’s true position with a standard deviation that varies across members. Members whose posi-

¹⁴See the online appendix for a more formal description.

tion in the space is closer to the applicant’s true position have more accurate perceptions of the applicant’s position.¹⁵ While misperceptions increase monotonically with distance, voting “mistakes” do not. For the most distant applicants, mistakes are unlikely due to the enormity of the misperception necessary to make a mistake. Mistakes are most likely when the distance is great enough to that misperceptions are plausible, but not too far that those misperceptions do not matter. We demonstrate with a simulation in the online appendix. Therefore, members could perceive themselves as being proximate to the applicant because they truly have proximate characteristics, or because they misperceive the applicants’ position due to distance. Because member states cannot observe the true position of the applicant, they cannot distinguish between these two possibilities. They have no way of knowing the accuracy of their perceptions.

Once an accession process starts, it can become difficult for members to obtain meaningful information on candidates. Candidates have every incentive to provide only information that supports their case for accession and to gloss over or be vague about any damaging information.¹⁶ So, while members might seek to learn more about a candidate, they cannot extract meaningful information that improves on what they previously knew. For that reason, we assume in the model that members cannot improve on their prior information. Note that awareness about the limited availability of information does not *per se* imply voting against a candidate. Members will evaluate the available information, however imperfect it may be, and assess the hypothetical scenario of the enlarged organization relative to the existing organizational dynamics.

¹⁵This view reflects what is known as the first law of geography, that ‘everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things’ (Tobler, 1970). See also Axelrod (2006); Jervis (1976).

¹⁶The case of the Baltic states and their treatment of Russian-language minorities illustrates this point; those countries (see Schimmelfennig, 2005). This is also true for the financial crises in Europe; Greece falsified many of the statistics that they reported to Brussels (“Greece condemned for falsifying data,” *Financial Times*, 12 January 2010), as did Hungary (“Hungary debt fears worry markets,” BBC, 4 June 2010).

After each member observes its private information about the position of the applicant, the existing members vote on whether to admit the applicant.¹⁷ When voting, members compare their perception of the hypothetical decision-making pivot in the organization following the admittance of the applicant to the existing pivot. In other words, if a member believes that admitting the applicant moves the organization’s pivotal member closer to its position, the member votes to admit, and to reject otherwise. If the applicant receives more than a required threshold of votes the applicant becomes a permanent member of the organization starting with the next round. The threshold for admitting members can vary, but the general logic of the model still applies. As the threshold increases, the number of new members admitted decreases. We present results for various thresholds below.

The voting rule implies that enlargement only occurs due to misperceptions. If all members perceived applicants’ positions perfectly, those on the same side of the pivotal member would vote to admit a given candidate, while those on the opposite side, as well as the pivot, would vote to reject. Enlargement occurs, when, due to misperceptions, coalitions form between states on opposite sides of the existing pivot. This implies that enlargements may turn out to be suboptimal for at least some member states who incorrectly perceived the candidate, and perhaps for the stability of the organization overall.

The game continues until members reach the (preset) final round. Varying the parameters of the model, we examine how the number of members, the range of their positions, and the position of the organization’s median, change over these rounds. We look for emergence of stable equilibria, or situations in which the organization’s membership ceases to change. Thus, this model allows for the inclusion of several important dynamics. It enables us to investigate how multiple actors simultaneously attempt to evaluate the position of candidates.

¹⁷It is possible that knowing other members’ opinions would provide further information to the member states, allowing them to update their assessment of the candidate. At the same time, however, members may simply assume that their own information on the candidate is superior to those of the other members. Furthermore, states on opposite of the pivot could be quite close to one another, and thus it members may come to the same conclusion even when they should not do so.

It also allows us to subsequently investigate the shifting dynamics once those candidates themselves become voting members, and how misperceptions might potentially compound over time.

Simulations and Empirical Implications

Using our model, we explore the impact of initial membership configurations on enlargement outcomes. We conduct simulations of enlargement outcomes by randomly drawing 100 initial membership configurations that include a minimum of four and a maximum of 30 members. Our initial memberships vary with respect to the number of initial members and the initial range and dispersion of those members' positions. Initial memberships were drawn using a sampling procedure that ensures that dispersion, range, and number of members have reasonably low correlations. Some configurations, therefore, correspond with low-range, low-dispersion organizations such as ASEAN, while others correspond to high-range, low-dispersion organizations (such as the UN), and still others correspond to high-range, high-dispersion organizations. In short, we draw a sufficient number of initial memberships so we can sweep through the parameter space. For each of the 100 initial memberships, we run 300 simulations of 150 rounds each. We examine change in membership by looking at summary statistics of the differences between the first and 150th round across the 300 simulations as a function of the configuration of initial member positions.

We focus on how the position of the median member shifts as a function of the number of initial members and their attributes' dispersion and range; how dispersion changes as a function of the same three variables; and how many new members join as a function of these three variables. We can easily measure the range and number of members, but dispersion less so. We measure dispersion using the dispersion coefficient, calculated in the same manner as a Gini coefficient, where a higher coefficient implies less equal dispersion of membership positions throughout the space. In other words, a higher dispersion coefficient implies a clustering of member positions in different parts of the space, as opposed to an equal distribution of positions across the entire space.

We examine the impact of different aspects of these initial membership configurations on various subsequent simulation outcomes by performing three regressions in which we use the

initial number of members, the initial range, and initial dispersion as independent variables. Our first dependent variable is *Median Change*. We calculate the absolute difference between the position of the median member in the first and 150th round for each of the 300 simulations and then calculate the median of these median changes. Second, we calculate *Dispersion Change* by calculating the ratio of the final round Gini to the first round for each of the 300 simulations and then calculating the median. Thus, a number less than one represents a move towards less dispersion and number greater than one represents a move towards more dispersion. Lastly, we examine *Expansion* by subtracting the final number of members from the initial number and calculating the median difference over the 300 simulations.

We plot standardized regression coefficients so we can directly compare the relative effects of our variables on the different aspects of the initial member configurations. Figure 1 presents the results of these models visually for three different decision-making thresholds. The far left figure shows the results for a simple-majority threshold for admitting members. The middle figure presents results when admittance requires a qualified majority of 67%. And the far right figure assumes an admittance threshold of 75%. The online appendix offers regression tables with more information about each model.

The x -axes in plots a–c of Figure 1 report the standard deviation change in the dependent variables (*Median Change*, *Dispersion Change*, and *Expansion*) for every standard deviation change in the independent variable (*Initial Size*, *Initial Range*, and *Initial Dispersion*). The dashed vertical lines at zero represent no effect. Thus, in the median change models — the models at the top of the three plots — the statistically significant negative effect of initial size (indicated by the negative point prediction and confidence intervals that do not intersect the vertical line) implies that when the number of initial members increases by one standard deviation, the organization experiences significantly less change to its median member’s position over the course of the simulation. The figure also shows that an organization’s center of gravity shifts more when the organization has a more dispersed initial membership (that is, members tend to cluster more in groups on the dimension). The initial range of members does not have a consistent effect on median change across admittance thresholds.

In our next set of models — the middle row of Figure 1 — we examine change in the dispersion of member preferences. Here we find that all three variables have statistically

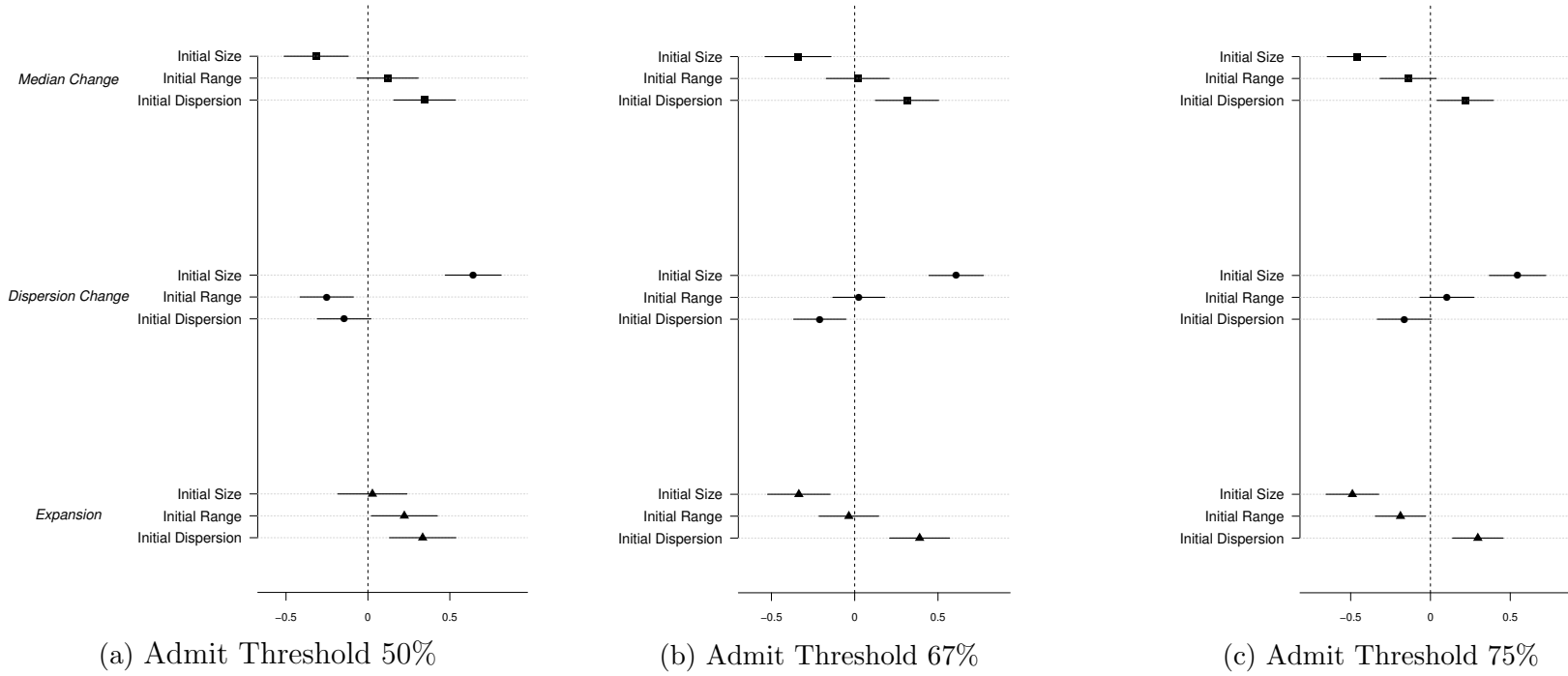


Figure 1: *Plots of Standardized Regression Output.* The models demonstrate the effect of the initial model configuration on group change. The standardized regression coefficients from each model (Median Change, Dispersion Change, and Expansion) are plotted with 95% confidence intervals. The dashed vertical line represents zero, or no effect. We present full regression results for all three models in the online appendix.

significant, or borderline statistically significant, effects in the 50% threshold model (a). The effect for initial size remains statistically significant across the three threshold specifications, with a greater number of initial members leading to greater dispersion over the course of the simulations, as measured by the median dispersion ratio. Organizations with large initial dispersions experience a decrease in dispersion over time as new members tend to fill in gaps between the clusters of existing members. The same holds true for large initial ranges, but only in the lefthand model when the admittance threshold is low.

Finally, we examine whether organizations add more new members as a function of the initial membership configuration. An increase in initial members' dispersion leads to more expansion, and the effect for the dispersion coefficient reaches statistical significance across all thresholds. The initial member range has no clear impact on the number of new applicants the organization admits — when the admittance threshold is low, a greater range tends to lead to more expansion, but when the threshold is high, a greater initial range leads to fewer new members. Lastly, the number of initial members, depending on the threshold, has either no impact on the number of new members or a negative impact. Taken together, these models suggest that organizations which start out relatively small and have a high dispersion and range of initial members are more likely to experience change.

We summarize the results of our theoretical modeling exercise in the following three propositions, which follow directly from the results of the agent-based model.

Proposition 1: The median of an organization is most likely to shift over time with enlargement when the initial group membership is unevenly dispersed (members cluster on a given dimension making initial dispersion high) and the initial number of members is small.

Proposition 2: Dispersion of members on a given dimension decreases over time with enlargement when the initial range of members is large, the initial membership is clustered (unevenly dispersed), but increases when the initial number of members is large.

Proposition 3: Organizations that start out as smaller, more homogenous groups with even dispersion experience a greater number of enlargement rounds,

but these rounds have less effect on the nature of the organization (that is, the dispersion of members).

These propositions suggest that the model has implications for macro-level phenomena, namely that the initial ideological composition of members has a great impact on whether and how future enlargement affects the nature of the group. The model implies that relatively small changes in the configuration of initial members can have large consequences for the long-term nature of the organization. When organizations start out as homogenous clubs (that is, the positions of their initial members have low dispersion), the enlargement process will likely not alter the IO drastically. However, if an otherwise homogenous club expands to include some dissimilar members, thus increasing dispersion, the expansion could end up tipping the balance toward those dissimilar members. An organization cannot assume that admitting one or two members different from the rest of an otherwise homogenous group has little impact. If misperceptions regarding applicants occur, the organization is likely to change to look more like that outlying member as new members fill in the ideological gaps between the clusters. If the organization aims to create diversity, this may be viewed as normatively good. However, to the extent that existing members do not want the group to evolve in this direction, such an outcome would be undesirable.

Application to NAFTA and the FTAA

We now examine different aspects of our model with evidence from the case of trade agreements in the Americas. NAFTA remains one of the world's most successful trade agreements; Baldwin (2007) argues that outside of Europe, only NAFTA has liberalized trade that would not have been liberalized otherwise. The number of countries involved has also remained stable with no enlargement following the agreement's inception. However, there were several enlargement proposals that we argue would have changed the organization substantially. In the 1990s, the US, Canada, Mexico and several other Latin American countries had ambitious plans for multilateral trade organizations in the Western hemisphere. We discuss the various configurations of countries under consideration at the time and use our model to simulate NAFTA enlargement scenarios in the online appendix.

NAFTA originated with US President Ronald Reagan’s administration. Reagan had campaigned on the promise of broadening trade in the Americas, with lobbying pressure from US business interests (Chase, 2003). Once his administration received fast-track trade promotion authority, negotiations for a trade agreement with Canada began in 1986. Signed in 1988, the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement went into effect in 1989. Those two countries boasted similarities on several dimensions: culturally, linguistically, and economically. Under the leadership of the pro-market President Carlos Salinas, in 1990 Mexico began lobbying the US to join NAFTA (Golob, 2003). By that time, George H. W. Bush was in power, and his administration envisaged a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) that would span both hemispheres. Enlarging the US-Canada FTA to include Mexico, making it NAFTA, was an initial step in the creation of this proposed agreement.

Then-US President George Bush put in a request for fast-track authorization of NAFTA in March 1991, which he received with bipartisan support, and the agreement was ratified in November of 1993. Further expansion of NAFTA had always been part of the agenda, and after it was ratified in 1994 then-President Bill Clinton expressed his desire to “reach out to the other market-oriented democracies to ask them to join in this great American pact” (Scherlen, 1998). NAFTA expansion was the primary item of business in the December 1994 Summit of the Americas in Miami, attended by all heads of state of the Western hemisphere. The United States Trade Representative (USTR) in particular pushed this agenda aggressively, meeting with Chile as well as other Latin American heads of state to discuss the accession process, including a timetable for the FTAA. At the time, many viewed further expansion as a foregone conclusion; economist Guillermo Calvo was quoted as saying, “It is definitely like a single domino, if one falls all the others will begin to fall, like Mexico with NAFTA. If Chile enters, Argentina will want to enter, and then Brazil.”¹⁸

Misperceptions

We argue that *misperceptions* of Mexico’s trajectory for development played a pivotal role in the enlargement of the agreement from the original configuration of two very similar coun-

¹⁸“FTAA to be associated historically with Clinton.” *Gazeta Mercantil*, 24 October 1997.

tries. Following the debt crisis of the early 1980s, Mexico had undergone substantial economic restructuring, in part thanks to conditionality imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Mexico's stabilization and subsequent reforms led the majority to perceive it to be on track for rapid economic growth in the coming years. However, by 1994 economists were already admitting that "a far too optimistic view may have been taken of Mexico's future" (Dornbusch et al., 1994).

Mexico had long pursued a policy of import substituting industrialization, but after its debt crisis in 1982, it began to turn toward neoliberal economic policies. In particular, Carlos Salinas, who became the country's president in 1988, explicitly pursued trade deals (including with the EU and Japan) as a way of locking in Mexico's open-market reforms. Canada was initially lukewarm at the prospect of a trade deal but agreed to consider Mexico as a trading partner in NAFTA, not because of enthusiasm over Mexico *per se* but due to its desire to have broader trade with Latin America more generally (Scherlen, 1998; Grayson, 1993). The initial debate in the US and Canada, in fact, centered more on consistency with the countries' GATT and Uruguay Round obligations than with fears about the potential consequences of entering into an agreement with a dissimilar country (Claveau, 1998).

But already by 1994, Mexico had begun showing its dissimilarity to the US and Canada. In January of that year, a massive uprising broke out in Chiapas; the frontrunner in the presidential campaign was assassinated in March; and investors staged a run on the Mexican peso, leading to a massive devaluation at the end of the year. The country then defaulted on \$30 billion in *tesobonos*, Mexican government securities denominated in US dollars. The default amounted to around half of its total debt burden. The United States came to its rescue, as it had during the peso crisis of 1982. Facing Congressional objection to a unilateral bailout of \$40 billion, Clinton arranged a \$32 billion bailout package courtesy of the IMF and the Bank of International Settlements, with the US contributing an additional \$20 billion. This was in large part an attempt to salvage the credibility of the NAFTA project; as one researcher put it, "Mexico in NAFTA meant the United States could not afford to stand aside" (Strange, 1998, p. 109). By 1995, Congress was pushing to reevaluate NAFTA and even consider withdrawal.

This example illustrates the role of misperceptions in IO enlargement. Many attributed

the US Congressional backpedaling as a realization of “the relative economic parity between the United States and Canada — as compared to the great disparity between the United States and Mexico” (Scherlen, 1998). There was also a sense that the US public had been misled as to the consequences of trade integration with Mexico: one paper wrote, “After portraying Mexico as the modern counterpart to Britain during the Blitz, it is easy to point to drug corruption and one-party politics as evidence that trade agreements don’t work.”¹⁹ After the bailout in particular, there was bipartisan agreement to halt any move toward closer ties with Latin America. “I’m not sure we’re ready for more adventures,” Sen. Daniel Moynihan was quoted as saying at the time.²⁰ Once the US and Canada recognized the extent of their misperceptions of Mexico, they lowered their tolerance for future misperceptions, and enlargement simply did not occur, as described in our model.

NAFTA enlargement scenarios

Once Mexico was admitted, Chile was originally next in line to join NAFTA (Brown, Dendorff and Stern, 1995). Expansion of NAFTA had been one of Clinton’s primary goals in office; at the time of his reelection, he expressed his wish that “the United States can position itself at the hub of a constellation of trade groups, particularly in Latin America and Asia.”²¹ Clinton attempted to position Chile as the frontrunner for expansion, and did so on the grounds of its similarity to the US and Canada thanks to its economic reforms.²² “No other country in Latin America has a better record of economic accomplishments in the past 10 years than Chile,” the head of USTR was quoted as saying.²³ Chile already had a preferential trade agreement (PTA) with Mexico that had entered into force in 1992, and its entry was promised to the Chilean president first by Bush and then by Clinton. Under

¹⁹ “Clinton agenda on fast track to nowhere.” *USA Today*, 3 October 1997.

²⁰ “Can NAFTA still expand to Chile?” *Journal of Commerce*, 6 April 1995.

²¹ “Fast track, Chile accord top Clinton’s trade agenda.” *National Journal’s Congress Daily*, 7 March 1997.

²² “Dates set for NAFTA Chile talks.” *The Toronto Star*, 4 July 1995.

²³ “U.S. backs Chilean NAFTA membership.” *United Press International*, 21 June 1995.

Pinochet, Chile had initiated market reforms — including privatization of state-owned enterprises, currency stabilization, and trade liberalization — almost a decade prior to any other country in Latin America. It was considered “the least controversial country the US can negotiate with in Latin America [...] which has fulfilled all of the requirements for NAFTA membership.”²⁴ One business representative was quoted as saying “when you look at Chile, there’s not a more qualified candidate. [...] I think you could say that Chile is probably more qualified to join NAFTA than half a dozen U.S. states.”²⁵

Many other states were slated to join as well. Argentina was the most widely discussed candidate for NAFTA accession after Chile, followed by Venezuela and Colombia. In 1994 the Argentinian foreign ministry claimed that it could join NAFTA by 1996.²⁶ The US Secretary of Commerce at the time said that during the period when “NAFTA was under negotiation, there literally wasn’t a week that went by that a foreign minister or economic minister from a Latin American country didn’t call saying, ‘I want our country to be on the NAFTA list.’”²⁷ There were also several proposals for enlargement on the table. The US was considering letting countries in by blocs, including Mercosur members and the Andean Community. The Canadian government’s position was that if existing PTAs were harmonized, NAFTA would not be necessary. Another approach was for existing IOs, such as the Organization of American States, to coordinate the integration process (Miller, 1996).

However, after the Mexico bailout, the ideological consensus in the US turned protectionist, with many legislators raising concerns regarding labor and environmental standards (Hafner-Burton, 2006). By 1997, the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) had been seriously derailed, primarily because of US domestic reluctance. A Congressional vote extending Clinton’s “fast track” trade promotion authority was postponed on November 11,

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶“US links Argentina’s NAFTA entry to approval of new patent legislation.” *International Trade Representative*, 9 March 1994.

²⁷“Expanding NAFTA to include Chile: The next step for free trade.” *Heritage Foundation Roundtable*, 15 December 1995.

1997; Congress finally voted it down on September 25, 1998, by a 243-180 vote. Acting in part on the suspicion that President Clinton would be unable to secure fast track authority from Congress, Chile had signed a free-trade agreement with Mercosur in 1996 and with Canada in June 1997. That same year an antidumping and countervailing duty petition that affected imports of Chilean salmon was filed in the United States. That was the last effort under the Clinton administration to try to push the FTAA agenda.

President George W. Bush attempted to revive the effort, managing to secure fast-track authority by one vote in 2001. The House of Representatives passed legislation creating a Central American Free Trade Agreement (to include an end of tariffs on goods from the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua), in a narrow 217-215 vote, on July 29, 2005. But the Mercosur countries wanted US farming subsidies to be eliminated as part of the deal; Paraguay would only go along if it received special treatment; and Brazil was more interested in exercising leverage in the WTO.²⁸ Skepticism on the passage of the talks was widespread due to opposition from Latin American countries as well as lack of enthusiasm in the US Congress; typical headlines on articles discussing the plan were “FTAA dead in the water?” and “US efforts to revive FTAA unlikely to succeed.” In 2006, another round of enthusiasm for the FTAA, particularly after the collapse of the Doha round of WTO negotiations, was curtailed by protests at the site of negotiations. Even though talks still formally continue, “the intensity has lessened,” and Brazil’s opposition to the advancement of the FTAA as well as the US’s shift in priorities

²⁸One might argue that outside options for countries such as Brazil and Chile put a stop to enlargement, not misperceptions on the side of the US. Indeed, much work in political science has focused on exit options and international agreements (see, for example, Gray and Slapin (2013); Slapin (2009); Odell and Eichengreen (1998)). However, in this particular case we do not think that exit options motivated the standstill. Both Chile and Brazil continued to lobby the US for market access via NAFTA during that time period, as a deal within the Americas would have reaped significant trading benefits. Nonetheless, future extensions of this model could include multiple IOs from which to choose and how that affects both perceptions as well as expansions.

toward bilateral treaties means that the agreement presently has very little momentum.²⁹

Our model's Propositions 1 and 2 taken together suggest that had NAFTA originally included Chile, expansion would have shifted the balance of power away from the US and Canada towards Chile and Mexico. In the online appendix, we simulate different enlargement scenarios for NAFTA using our model — the original three-member configuration and a hypothetical four member configuration including Chile as an initial member. We find the original three-member NAFTA configuration to be very stable. If NAFTA had included Chile, our model suggests enlargement would have been feasible, especially at higher levels of misperception.

Conclusion

Organizations may benefit from enlargement, but change occurs when new and divergent members join. The diversity of the initial membership can impact the likelihood of dissimilar members gaining entrance to the group. Once admitted into the organization, the dynamics of the organization change, and the new member states may vote to admit other states more like themselves, further altering the dynamics within the institution. Our model helps explain how states that appear to be quite different from existing member states may gain admittance to an IO, and then change the nature of the IO after enlargement has occurred.

This has implications for the literature and policymaking on international organizations, which tends to operate on the assumption that expansion serves as an indicator of the success of an organization (although specific studies on individual IOs sometimes draw different conclusions). The benefits of enlargement and the perceived expansion of an IO's mandate and inclusiveness should be weighed against the particular costs of admitting applicants in an environment of misperceptions. Enlargement may change the character of an IO in unforeseen ways.

The theory contributes to our understanding of international organizations in several ways. First, it provides a framework for thinking about enlargement over an extended period of time and with a large number of actors. Second, it helps explain how enlargements

²⁹Author interview, USTR Americas representative Karen Lezny, 21 August 2007.

can change the nature of an organization. Once new members join and the gaps between member states grow, misperceptions of candidate countries become more likely. The size of and disparity among members result in possible voting coalitions that favor even more dissimilar candidates than the initial members. This finding helps explain backsliding and compliance gaps in international organizations. Moreover, the model and the insights drawn from it can be applied to any organization in which member states must vote on new members in order to include them — including academic departments in universities, law firms, or clubs. They can also help explain the changing character of organizations over time, in particular as a function of incorporating the divergent preferences of new members.

We have focused on the practical implications of IO enlargement, but much of the debates about expansion within IOs today center on normative consequences. Divergent members who push the organization in new directions may be a welcome development, if the organization prizes diversity and inclusion. This was evident in the case of ASEAN’s enlargement to include Cambodia, Laos, and Burma; one of the organization’s goals was to develop a membership that was representative of the many polities of Asia. However, if the organization aims to maintain a strict and bounded identity, any enlargements that dilute the initial principles and membership composition may be viewed as negative. Thus, the normative implications of enlargement vary depending on the goals of an organization.

Our theory does not speak specifically to the conditions that might provoke a member state’s exit from an IO. Nonetheless, it offers some insights as to how enlargements might create unsustainable pressures in an organization. If new members shift the policies and practices of the organization, the older members might reach a point where they no longer recognize the IO that they themselves helped found. Such pressures can lead to calls for exit, as we see now with the United Kingdom’s proposed “Brexit” from the European Union. Thus, enlargement to include disparate members can create unsustainable dynamics in international organizations.

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